

**Priority****Fairness in admissions and student life**

President Christina Paxson - All

The recent national admissions cheating scandal has raised questions about the integrity of the admissions process at selective colleges and universities. Even before this, schools across the country and at Brown have been engaged in discussions about equity and inclusion, with particular focus on perceptions of preferential treatment for the wealthy, legacy admissions, and concerns about the role of higher education in promoting upward mobility.

Brown's core values include commitments to academic excellence, access and equity. I feel strongly that students should be admitted to Brown based on demonstrated achievement and future promise, regardless of their ability to pay for college. And, once students come to campus, they deserve to be treated equally, with no special preferences due to family wealth or connections.

But we have to do more than merely express Brown's values in words. We also have to make sure that they are embedded in our everyday actions. In this letter, I describe the following steps Brown is taking to ensure that our policies and practices are aligned with our values:

-- In March, the University completed a case-by-case review of every recruited varsity athlete who enrolled at Brown over the last four years, and found no concerns. This internal investigation is being followed by a broader assessment to gauge any exposure to risk from falsified admissions materials.

-- I am charging a new joint Corporation-faculty Ad Hoc Committee on Equity and Integrity in Admissions to ensure our admissions process lives up to Brown's commitment to integrity, access and inclusion.

-- Brown is reviewing all of its policies and practices — beyond the focus on admissions, to include also alumni and donor relations, residential life and academic matters — to ensure that students are treated equitably and fairly in the course of their lives on campus

treated equitably and fairly in the course of their lives on campus.

Many of the questions being examined are rooted in considerations of ethics, and I want to remind the community that Brown has the Ethics and Compliance Reporting System, which allows anonymous and confidential reporting on any matter of concern through the EthicsPoint platform:

<https://secure.ethicspoint.com/domain/media/en/gui/25461/index.html>

## RESPONSE TO FEDERAL INVESTIGATION INTO ATHLETICS ADMISSIONS

Brown has not been contacted by federal agencies in connection with the U.S. Department of Justice's indictments last month of individuals who allegedly deceived admissions offices through the bribery of athletics coaches and standardized testing officials. None of the indicted families has children at Brown, and none of the indicted athletics staff has worked at Brown.

As noted above, an internal investigation of recruited athletes over the past four years generated no suspicions of illicit behavior. Three recruited athletes did not appear on varsity athletics rosters during their first year at Brown, but in each of these cases there were legitimate and well documented reasons, such as a major sports injury.

At Brown, the athletics office does not make independent decisions to admit student-athletes. Admissions officers review and make decisions about every applicant. This helps ensure the highest levels of integrity in admission of our student athletes. Our rigorous, comprehensive and individual review of every prospective student's qualifications remains essential in enrolling an academically talented and diverse class through a fair and equitable process.

To better understand if we are susceptible to risk, Brown's Office of Institutional Risk Management, Audit & Compliance will work with the University's coaches and athletics department staff in the coming months to gain insights into how we can enhance our protocols and procedures around admissions.

It's worth noting that many of the indictments in the bribery scandal dealt with falsified SAT scores, something universities cannot control. We rely on the integrity of the testing process. It is very disturbing that the integrity of the testing process was compromised, and we understand that there may be more federal indictments to come

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## AD HOC COMMITTEE ON EQUITY AND ACCESS

The admission scandal has contributed to an ongoing discussion about a host of questions related to equity in admissions. This includes whether test scores reflect qualifications of students across the income distribution, and what the inherent advantages are for students from families of means in the American education system.

To address these issues at Brown, I am charging the Ad Hoc Committee on Equity and Integrity in Admissions to consider two issues: first, whether Brown has adequate safeguards to protect the integrity of the admissions process, particularly around athletics recruitment; and second, whether Brown's admission practices align with our institutional goals of building academic excellence, making Brown accessible to students from all economic backgrounds, and ensuring long-run financial sustainability.

The committee will be co-chaired by Maria Zuber, chair of the Academic Affairs Committee of the Corporation of Brown University, and Provost Richard M. Locke. Due to privacy concerns and issues of confidentiality for student information and data, the ad hoc committee will include only members of the Brown University Corporation and the faculty. However, the committee will consult with students, staff and alumni. I expect the committee to deliver a report in fall 2019.

## EXAMINATION OF EQUITY AND FAIRNESS FOR STUDENT LIFE ON CAMPUS

As I noted above, I feel very strongly that students who come to Brown deserve to be treated equally and fairly, with no preferences due to family wealth or connections. However, this year there have been reports of instances in which students were given, or appeared to have been given, preferential treatment — for example, through invitations to exclusive off-campus dinners that were supported by University staff; requests of faculty to write letters in support of applicants whom they had met with only briefly; and allegations of favoritism in housing assignments. Similar instances have come to light at other universities, for example alleged favoritism in access to university-sponsored summer internships.

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Preferential treatment, real or suspected, for students based on wealth or privilege is corrosive to our community. We are looking carefully at all our practices across the University — from alumni and parent engagement, to residential life, to academic concerns, to student conduct — to make sure that favoritism has no influence on students' experiences.

At the same time, we are taking purposeful steps to ensure that opportunities at Brown are available to all students regardless of their income levels. We have expanded financial support for summer internships and research opportunities, and implemented other initiatives to remove financial barriers that can limit student success. This includes a recently-announced expansion of a program to provide textbooks to students on financial aid, as well as the elimination of loans in the University's packaged financial aid awards for all undergraduates.

Initiatives like these, paired with a careful review of policies and practices, will help ensure that Brown is living up to its values. Although we cannot eradicate all of the effects of living in an unequal world, colleges and universities should not and cannot be places where educational opportunities are shaped by wealth.

Sincerely,

Christina Paxson

President

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All

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